

NEWS RELEASE

**OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
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For Immediate Release

March 23, 2005

JOINT PRESS RELEASE OF

**Ronald J. Tenpas, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois
Weysan Dun, Special Agent in Charge, FBI, Springfield Division
B. Bernard Ferguson, Inspector in Charge, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, St. Louis
Byram Tichenor, Special Agent in Charge, IRS Criminal Investigation Division, Chicago
Charles Brueggemann, Colonel, Illinois State Police**

Ronald J. Tenpas, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, announced today the unsealing of an indictment recently returned by the federal grand jury sitting in East St. Louis. The five count indictment names **CHARLES POWELL, JR.**, age 61, **JESSE LEWIS**, age 56, **SHEILA THOMAS**, age 31, **KELVIN ELLIS**, age 55, and **YVETTE JOHNSON**, age 46. All claim residency in East St. Louis, Illinois

All five defendants are charged, in Count 1 of the indictment, with Conspiracy to Commit Election Fraud. Count 1, which carries a sentence of up to five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine, alleges that beginning on or about October 1, 2004, and continuing through on or about December 15, 2004, the defendants participated in a conspiracy "to knowingly and willfully pay and offer to pay voters for voting the...November 2, 2004 general election." In addition to the conspiracy, **LEWIS** (Count 2), **THOMAS** (Count 3), **ELLIS** (Count 4), and **JOHNSON** (Count 5) are separately charged with Election Fraud for conduct related to the November 2, 2004 general election in East St. Louis, Illinois. Election Fraud carries a possible penalty of five years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000.

The indictment alleges that **POWELL**, **LEWIS**, **THOMAS**, and **ELLIS** were elected Democratic Precinct Committeemen, and **JOHNSON** was a Precinct worker in East St. Louis, Illinois, at the time of the alleged offenses.

An indictment contains charges filed against a defendant. Under the law, a defendant is presumed to be innocent of all charges until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

It was also announced that on March 22, 2005, **LEROY SCOTT, JR.**, **LILLIE NICHOLS**, **TERRANCE STITH**, and **SANDRA STITH** entered pleas of guilty to Election Fraud, in United States District Court in East St. Louis. Sentencing has been scheduled for June 3, 2005. Each face a possible sentence of five years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000. According to a Statement of Facts provided to the Court at the time of the plea, **SCOTT**, **NICHOLS**, and **TERRANCE STITH** were Democratic Precinct Committeemen and

SANDRA STITH was a Precinct worker in East St. Louis. Each admitted that they had paid voters to vote in the November 2004 general election and had done so at the direction of **CHARLES POWELL, JR.** and other individuals.

The indictment and each of the pleas are the direct result of the work of the Metro East Public Corruption Task Force, the formation of which was announced in January of this year. Law enforcement agencies participating in the task force include the FBI, the United States Postal Inspection Service, the IRS, Criminal Investigation Division, and the Illinois State Police.

“Fair elections depend on voters selecting candidates for the quality of their ideas and the qualifications they present,” said Ronald J. Tenpas, United States Attorney. “When voters are paid for their votes, our democracy is corrupted in fundamental ways, and corrupted to the detriment of all. We intend to investigate vigorously, and prosecute fully, any allegations of fraud in the voting system.”

FBI Special Agent-in-Charge (SAC) Weysan Dun said, “This indictment and today’s arrests are the latest results of an ongoing, concerted and focused multi-agency effort to root out corruption and criminal activity on the part of public officials in East St. Louis and other communities in the Metro East region. The allegations of Voter Fraud, as announced today, represent criminal activities which undermine the public’s confidence in government. This type of criminal activity should not be tolerated by citizens of the community. A number of citizens have come forward and provided information and assistance to the Metro East Public Corruption Task Force since the announcement of its creation on January 21, 2005. This indictment would not have been possible without the public’s assistance and citizens are encouraged to continue to provide information to the task force, which may be reached at the FBI Office in Fairview Heights at (618) 397-4401.

B. Bernard Ferguson, Inspector in Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service stated, “The U.S. Postal Inspection Service often works closely with other federal agents, police officers, sheriffs, and other local and state law enforcement officers and prosecutors. The Postal Inspection Service is proud of its history of such cooperation, which results in greater protection to the public against criminal attack. We will continue to work closely with the Metro East Public Corruption Task Force and vigorously investigate allegations of vote fraud and other crimes which affect the integrity of the U.S. Mail.”

IRS Criminal Investigation Division Special Agent in Charge Byram Tichenor stated that “IRS Criminal Investigation Division is proud to be a part of the Metro East Public Corruption Task Force and we gladly bring our financial expertise to this task force. The IRS Criminal Investigation Division takes pride in being the premier financial investigative agency.”

These prosecutions are being handled by Assistant United States Attorney Hal Goldsmith.